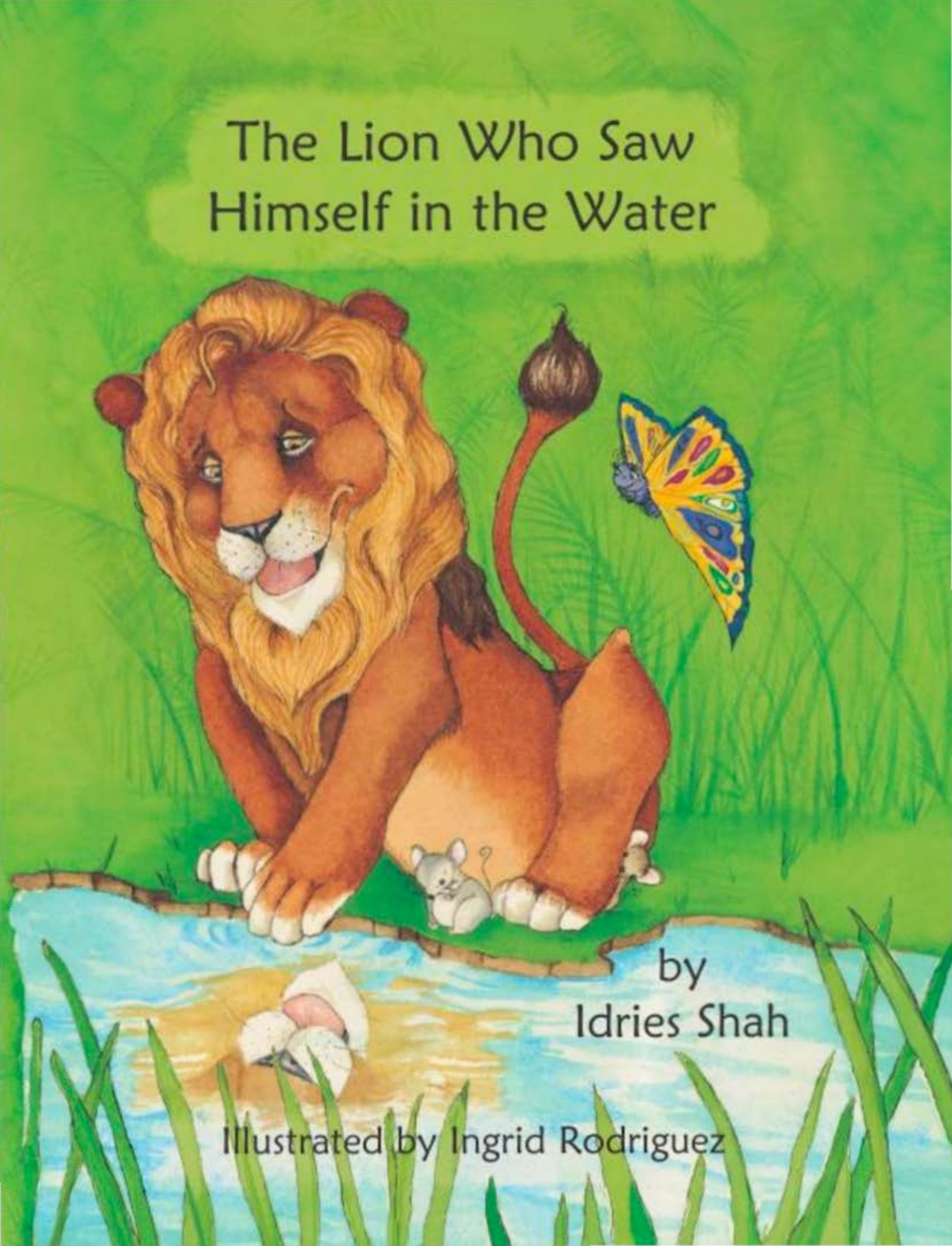

The Lion Who Saw
Himself in the Water
by
Idries Shah
Illustrated by Ingrid Rodriguez

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by Idries Shah



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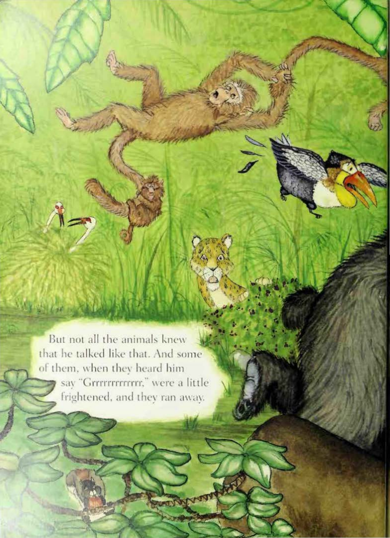
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Now, once upon a time there was a lion and his name was Share the Lion. And he was king of all the animals in the jungle.

He had a lovely golden mane on his head, all furry — just like hair, only furry and golden. And he had a lovely golden coat. He used to go about and say "Grrrrrrrrrrrr" because that's how lions talk.

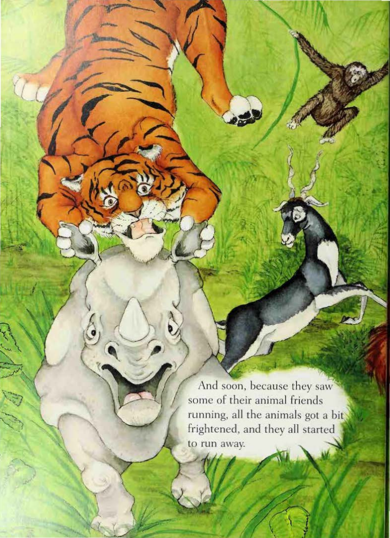






But not all the animals knew that he talked like that. And some of them, when they heard him say "Grrrrrrrrrrr," were a little frightened, and they ran away.





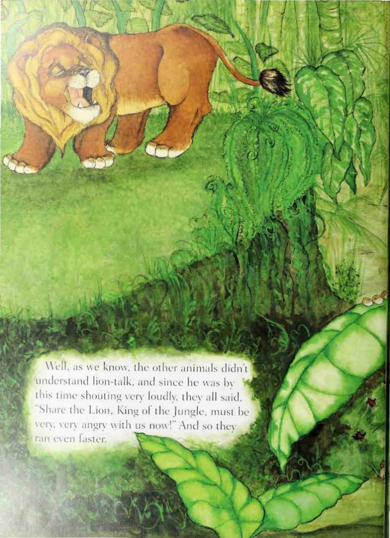
And soon, because they saw some of their animal friends running, all the animals got a bit frightened, and they all started to run away.



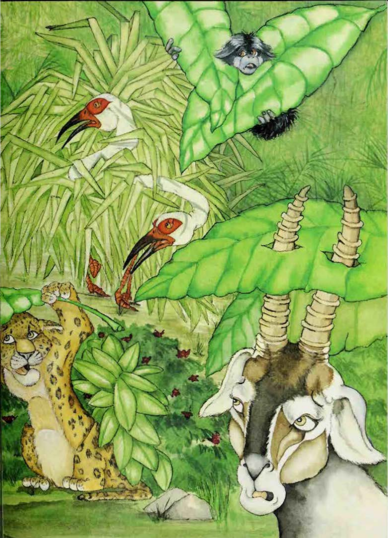
Now, Share the Lion thought, "That's funny! Why is everybody running away from me?" So he shouted, "Grr-grrr?" which, in lion-talk, means "Why are you running away?"







Well, as we know, the other animals didn't understand lion-talk, and since he was by this time shouting very loudly, they all said, "Share the Lion, King of the Jungle, must be very, very angry with us now!" And so they ran even faster.



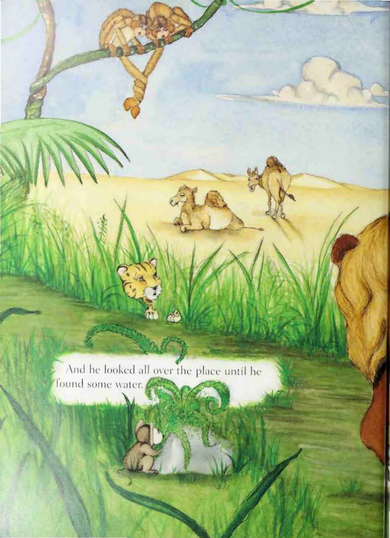


Of course, Share wasn't angry at all. He just wanted to know why they were all running away.

Then he thought, "Well, they are a silly lot of animals! I won't take any notice of them. I'm thirsty. I think I'll go and have a drink of water from a pool."



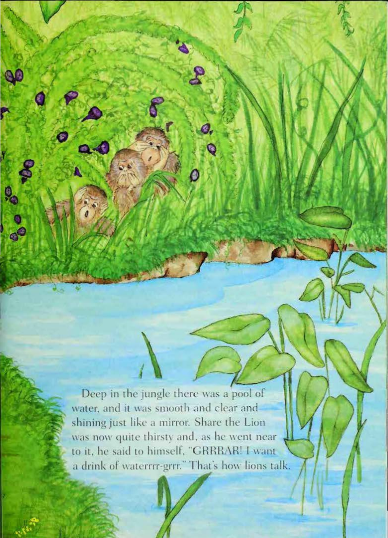




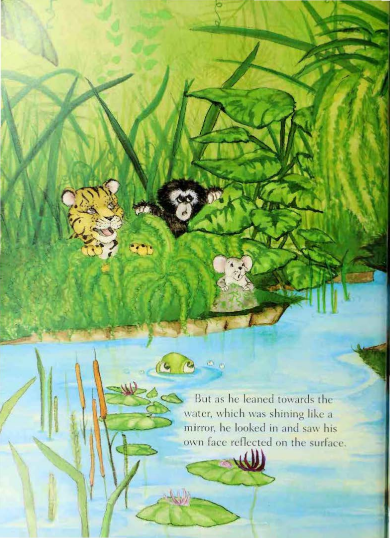
And he looked all over the place until he found some water.







Deep in the jungle there was a pool of water, and it was smooth and clear and shining just like a mirror. Share the Lion was now quite thirsty and, as he went near to it, he said to himself, "GRRRAR! I want a drink of waterrrr-grrr." That's how lions talk.



But as he leaned towards the water, which was shining like a mirror, he looked in and saw his own face reflected on the surface.



Well, he had never seen that before, and so he thought there was another lion in the pool of water, who was looking back at him.

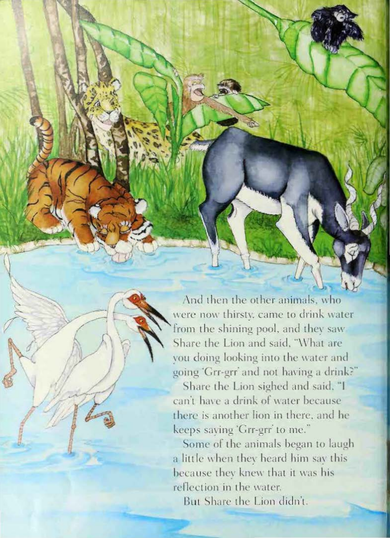
And he was too afraid of this other lion to drink anything at all!

Wasn't he a funny lion?

"Oh, dear me!" he said to himself. "That's another lion, and he wants to stop me drinking his water." And then he said, "Grrrr!" to the other lion, which, in lion-talk, means "I want some water too!"





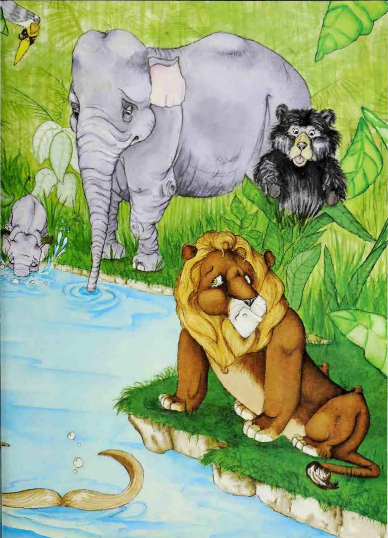


And then the other animals, who were now thirsty, came to drink water from the shining pool, and they saw Share the Lion and said, "What are you doing looking into the water and going 'Grr-grr' and not having a drink?"

Share the Lion sighed and said, "I can't have a drink of water because there is another lion in there, and he keeps saying 'Grr-grr' to me."

Some of the animals began to laugh a little when they heard him say this because they knew that it was his reflection in the water.

But Share the Lion didn't.

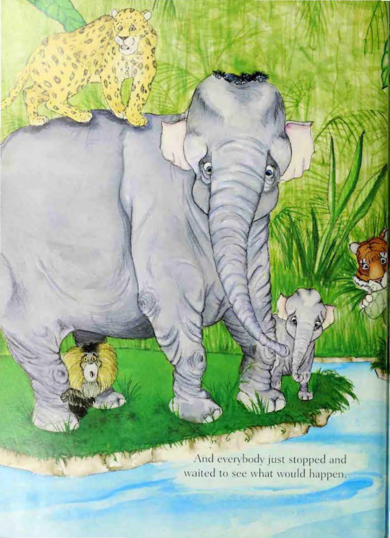


And then a beautiful butterfly flew very close to the Lion's ear and said in her tiny little voice, "Don't be silly, Share the Lion. There's nobody in the water!"

But Share the Lion said, "Of course there's somebody in the water. I can see him!"







And everybody just stopped and
waited to see what would happen.

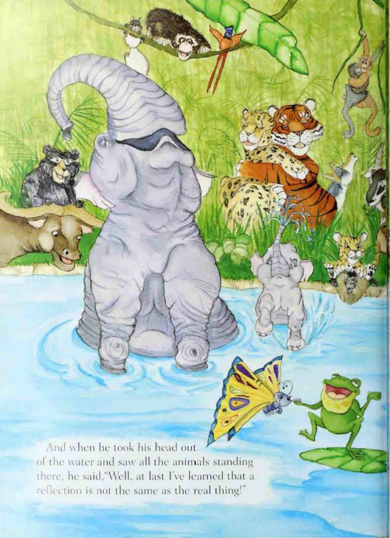




And Share the Lion, King of the Jungle, got thirstier and thirstier and thirstier and thirstier, and in the end he said, "I don't care. I've got to have water. I am terribly thirsty. I don't care about that lion in there, or how fierce he is!"

And he put his head into the water, and when he did, he felt the lovely cool water in his mouth and began to drink. As he drank, he saw that the other lion had disappeared. Of course, it had disappeared because it was never really there at all. It was just his own reflection in the water.





And when he took his head out
of the water and saw all the animals standing
there, he said,"Well, at last I've learned that a
reflection is not the same as the real thing!"





And so, everybody lived happily ever after.

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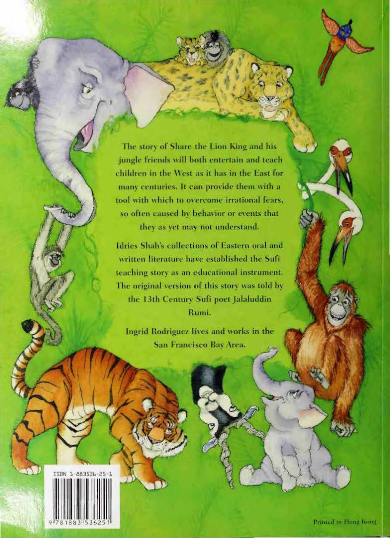
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The story of Share the Lion King and his jungle friends will both entertain and teach children in the West as it has in the East for many centuries. It can provide them with a tool with which to overcome irrational fears, so often caused by behavior or events that they as yet may not understand.

Idries Shah's collections of Eastern oral and written literature have established the Sufi teaching story as an educational instrument. The original version of this story was told by the 13th Century Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi.

Ingrid Rodriguez lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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